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UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF OREGON
MEDFORD DIVISION

KLAMATH-SISKIYOU WILDLANDS
CENTER, OREGON WILD, CASCADIA
WILDLANDS, and SODA MOUNTAIN
WILDERNESS COUNCIL,

Plaintiffs,

vs.

UNITED STATES BUREAU OF LAND
MANAGEMENT,

Defendant.

Civ. Case No. 1:19-cv-02069-CL

**FIRST DECLARATION OF PEPPER W.
TRAIL**

I, PEPPER W. TRAIL, declare as follows:

1. I am a current member of the Klamath Siskiyou Wildlands Center.

2. I personally utilize public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management's Ashland Resource Area to look for and enjoy native bird species. Of particular importance to me is the habitat for great gray owls that is provided by BLM-managed forests in the vicinity of Howard Prairie Lake.

3. I live in Ashland, and have visited these forests at least monthly over the past 20 years. As an experienced local naturalist (and professional ornithologist), I've often been asked to guide visiting birders to view great gray owls in the area, and I was also a keynote speaker at the first Mountain Birding Festival of the Klamath Bird Observatory, which featured this great gray owl population as a main attraction. Visitors I have taken to the Howard Prairie area seeking the owls have included family members, friends, birders from California and Virginia, and professors from Oregon State University. Thanks to the healthy population of great gray owls in the Howard Prairie area – one of the most dense and easily viewed in the state – these searches have been successful over half the time.

4. Great gray owls are magnificent birds, and it is always a delight to share the experience of someone viewing one for the first time. It never fails to make a profound impression. Their awe only increases when I explain the species' biology, such as how the owls are able hear mice under the snow, and successfully hunt them.

5. As an ornithologist, I know that great gray owl populations in Oregon, and indeed in the Pacific Northwest generally, are highly local. They typically depend on conifer forests with large old trees (where they nest in broken-topped snags) interspersed with open meadows for hunting voles and other prey. This characterizes the habitat of the Howard Prairie area, and is precisely why this habitat should not be subjected to further logging and fragmentation, which may threaten the viability of this great gray owl population.

6. If the great gray owl population of the Howard Prairie area is harmed or lost as a result of the Griffin Half Moon timber sale, the impacts will be profound both to me personally and to the species. The ecological role of this important predator will be diminished or removed entirely from the ecosystem. The unique gene pool of our locally-adapted population could be lost. Its potential to connect great gray owl populations in northeastern Oregon with smaller ones in the Siskiyou and the Sierra Nevada will be threatened. The economic benefits brought by birders visiting our region to see these famous great gray owls will disappear. And the rich and unquantifiable experience of observing these awe-inspiring birds will be denied to everyone after.

7. My response to these owls is not only scientific, however. I am also a poet, and my experiences with the great gray owls of Howard Prairie gave rise to the poem below.

Ode to the Great Gray Owl

You are great with feathers
your bulk a weightless cloak
knit of hooks and barbs
color of broken stone
soft as rabbit fur
hiding your silent heart

At the edge of everything
you wait unblinking
eyes centered in iron rings
invisible ears attending
the whispering feet
of mice within the snow

And then you are in the air
soundless, your feathers
the stuff of air
your wings flare just so
you drop somehow to earth
legs suddenly long
driving deep, feet opening
like nightmare jaws

four black fangs

The mouse in his home
in the deep snow
is pierced, pulled
into the light
swallowed in one bite
or two
and the owl melts
into the trees
leaving in the white meadow
the mark of an angel
and a single drop
of blood

Dated: March 11, 2020.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Pepper W. Trail

Pepper W. Trail